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SERMON

PREACHED IN

LAMBETH CHAPEL,

AT THE

CONSECRATION

OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND JOHN BUTLER, LL.D.
LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD.

ON SUNDAY, MAY 25, 1777.

By JOHN STURGES, A.M.
PREBENDARY OF WINCHESTER, AND CHAPLAIN
IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY.

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SERMON, &c.

1 CORINTHIANS, CHAP. XII. VER. 5.

THERE ARE DIFFERENCES OF ADMINISTRATIONS, BUT THE SAME LORD.

THE Apoſtle is ſpeaking in this paſſage of the different ſupernatural powers, which ſubſiſted in the Church of Corinth, and which were conferred by God on ſome of it's members, for the purpoſe of nurſing up the Religion of Chriſt, then in an infant ſtate, and of bringing it by degrees to maturity and ſtrength. He exhorts the Corinthians, not to be ſo far ambitious of obtaining ſome ſpiritual gifts in preference to others, as to be diſſatisfied with that province, which it had pleaſed God reſpectively to aſſign to them; and he illuſtrates the expediency of theſe gifts being different, and the duties ariſing from them diſtinct, by an obvious but very

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appoſite compariſon of them, with the various forms and uſes of the different members of the Human Body; all neceſſary to that Being, of which they make a part; all concurring by their due arrangement and union to form a perfect Man, completely fitted for the purpoſes of his nature. 'Whatever diverſities there might be, in this early age of the 'Church, of Gifts, of Adminiſtrations, of Powers, yet they 'proceeded from the ſame Spirit, the ſame Lord, and the ſame 'God, who worked all in all;' they all tended to one point, the propagation and eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity.

The words of the text ſeem applicable not only to the different ranks and offices of the Miniſters of Religion in the ſame Church, but alſo to the various Modes of Adminiſtration in different Churches; as theſe too, however various, yet by being adapted to the circumſtances of the Times and Countries, in which they ſubſiſt, may all tend to one object, the ſupport of Chriſt's Religion; an object, that will be attained more or leſs perfectly in proportion to the fitneſs of the means employed to attain it. In the following diſcourſe therefore I ſhall beg leave to treat the words as being thus applicable; and ſhall conſider not only the General Neceſſity of Proviſion being made in all Chriſtian Countries for perpetuating Religious Knowledge and enforcing Religious Truths, but alſo the Expediency of this Proviſion being adapted to the different circumſtances of each Country; with a particular view, not as I ſhould hope improper on the preſent

ſent occaſion, to that Proviſion, which is made for theſe purpoſes in our own.

In every proſpect of Human Affairs, even of thoſe Inſtitutions, in conducting which wiſdom and virtue may have had the greateſt ſhare, we ſhall always find a large proportion of Imperfections and Defects; we ſhould judge of ſuch Inſtitutions rather by a compariſon with others, than by their own abſolute merit and perfection; the characters of them, as of individuals, will for the moſt part be found mixed; and thoſe muſt be eſteemed excellent, wherein what is good ſhall appear very much to preponderate.

By all that we can diſcover of the works of God both in the Natural and Moral World, he always employs the fitteſt means to accompliſh his purpoſes. In the firſt planting and propagation of Chriſtianity the means employed were extraordinary and miraculous; nothing leſs than theſe would have anſwered the particular exigencies of the caſe. A New Religion, profeſſing to come immediately from God; declaring open war againſt all ſorts of vice, againſt all the crimes of men, which were then moſt prevalent; ſubverſive of all the popular ſuperſtitions, which ſubſiſted in moſt countries; and having alſo doctrines of it's own, which our Reaſon could never diſcover, and which when declared to us it can never fully comprehend; this Religion too, not having human

wiſdom for its advocate, or human power for it's ſupport, but on the contrary having all the prejudices of the firſt to contend with, and all the terrors of the latter ſet in array againſt it, required ſurely (if any thing could require it) the expreſs interpoſition of God in it's favour; it required credentials, which to thoſe who would attend to them ſhould be indiſputable.

Such in fact were the means employed by God; ſupernatural powers were conferred on the firſt Preachers of the Goſpel; they were various, as we may learn from that paſſage of St. Paul, of which the Text makes a part; and were all adapted to the demands of the infant Church. The planting and propagation of a Religion ſo circumſtanced, and by ſuch inſtruments as the firſt Preachers of it were, is an inſtance altogether ſingular in the Hiſtory of Mankind; and as ſuch cannot (I conceive) be accounted for to the ſatisfaction of any unprejudiced enquirer from mere Natural Cauſes; or juſtly be numbered among thoſe events, which the uſual courſe of Human Conduct and the workings of Human Paſſions could produce.

When the Goſpel had once taken root in the ſeveral countries, where it had been planted, it ſeems (as far as we may preſume to judge) equally conformable to the divine wiſdom, to leave the care of it to the ordinary and natural abilities of it's Profeſſors, as it was before to confer on them powers extraordinary

traordinary and ſupernatural. God in his government of the world appears never to be profuſe of theſe powers; but to reſerve them for purpoſes, to which all other means are inadequate, and in which when thus rarely exerted the evidence they afford is inconteſtable. In proportion to the time the Goſpel had continued, and the extent throughout which it was diffuſed, the obſtacles, in all appearance ſo inſuperable, which at firſt oppoſed it, were gradually removed; the prejudices againſt it were leſſened; proſelytes of all ranks gave it authority and countenance; and in the courſe of a few generations, beſides the protection of Civil Power, education, habit, and example, which had before been moſt adverſe to it, now operated in its favour. It's preſervation and ſupport therefore might now be ſafely committed to the wiſdom and piety of it's Profeſſors; but, like other bleſſings vouchſafed to us by God, it was not to be preſerved without due attention to it; proper means were to be employed in order to ſupport it: without theſe it's Doctrines would be forgotten, and it's Precepts ſink into diſuſe.

For they are both in their nature ſuch, that except they are continually inculcated and enforced, they will not be retained in our minds, or have a due influence on our conduct. Men are encompaſſed with ſenſible objects, which make the ſtrongeſt impreſſions on them; which are apt to take poſſeſſion of their thoughts, and to exclude others, however in themſelves more valuable and important. It requires ſome ſtrength

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of mind, a conſiderable exertion of its powers to call off our regard from things, that are continually ſolliciting it, in order to attend to thoſe of a diſtant and ſpiritual kind, with which our ſenſes have nothing to do, and which can only find employment for our reaſon.

This difficulty is alſo prodigiouſly increaſed by the unwillingneſs men feel in encouraging thoſe thoughts, which contradict their inclinations, and muſt give them unneaſineſs and diſquiet; they find it unpleaſant to be continually reflecting on commands, which they do not mean to obey, and to be put in mind of evils, which they are not careful to avoid. To this muſt be added, that ſome of the doctrines peculiar to Chriſtianity are in themſelves by no means obvious; we find in them thoſe difficulties, which always occur, when we apply our imperfect and limited faculties to contemplate the infinite nature and incomprehenſible diſpenſations of God; and therefore they will not eaſily be embraced or retained without being diligently explained and addreſt to us.

Hence then the Neceſſity of Religious Services and Religious Inſtruction; and conſequently of a Succeſſion of Men, whoſe office it ſhall be to adminiſter them. The Apoſtle, acting under the immediate influence of God and endued by him with ſupernatural powers, was not more neceſſary to the firſt planting of Chriſtianity; than the Miniſter, duely appointed to his office, and properly qualified for it both by his

morals and his knowledge, now is to the continuance and ſupport of it. Publick Worſhip could not otherwiſe be addreſt to God; the Rites, ordained by our divine Maſter, could not otherwiſe be celebrated. And to get over the careleſſneſs, the diſinclination, the depravity of mankind, the Services of Religion muſt conſtantly recur; the truths of it muſt be continually repeated, and inculcated with earneſtneſs; and they muſt both come from perſons, whoſe character will give ſolemnity to the offices they perform, to what they teach weight and credibility.

We are perhaps apt to undervalue the effects of Religious Inſtitutions, becauſe they are in their nature ſilent, gradual, and very difficult to be eſtimated; when we look on the licentiouſneſs of the world, we may be tempted to think that they amount to nothing; but could we ſee the ſum of them collected, could we be ſhewed one ſet of men, having the publick advantages of Divine Worſhip and Religious Inſtruction, and another, otherwiſe alike circumſtanced, wholly excluded from them, and compare their reſpective character and manners, the happy effects of ſuch Inſtitutions would then I am perſuaded abundantly appear. The Word of God, as conveyed by his Miniſters, and employed to inſtruct and to reform mankind, is not uſeleſs; the divine grace does not permit it to remain unfruitful. For (to uſe the beautiful language of Iſaiah ſpeaking in the perſon of God) "As the rain deſcendeth, And the "ſnow from heaven, And returneth not thither; But watereth "the

" the earth, And maketh it bring forth and bud, And giveth
" ſeed to the ſower and bread to the eater; So ſhall my Word
" be, that goeth forth from my mouth; It ſhall not return
" to me without effect; But it ſhall accompliſh that, which
" I have willed; And ſhall proſper in that, for which I have
" ſent it." Iſa. lv. 10.

But there is not only this General Neceſſity, that in all Chriſtian Countries Proviſion ſhould be made for explaining the Truths and inculcating the Precepts of the Goſpel; it is alſo highly Expedient, that this Proviſion ſhould be adapted to the different circumſtances of each Country, in order to it's being moſt effectual. The great end of preſerving the Belief of Religion, and of keeping alive it's influence on mankind, may beſt be anſwered by employing, as circumſtances require, means ſomewhat different.

Many things reſpecting the Outward Form of Religious Inſtitutions are in themſelves indifferent; are not determined by any particular command of Chriſt or his inſpired Followers; and may therefore ſafely be committed to Human Diſcretion, which will ſo ſelect, diſpoſe, and modify them, as the condition, manners and character of each country may require; provided always, that thoſe Truths and Precepts are preſerved in their purity, of which the Outward Form is only the inſtrument and vehicle. There is no doubt, that God deſigned Man for a Social as well as a Religious Being, that Civil

Society

Society is of his appointment, and that he demands our obedience to its Laws; but he has not dictated these Laws, or prescribed the precise form of each Society, it being the province of Human Wisdom to accommodate these to each particular case; provided always, that the great ends of all Society are answered, peace and security to its constituents.

In proportion as Christianity is more diffused, there must be more room for such differences; climate, forms of government, wealth, manner of living have so much effect on the opinions and conduct of mankind, that they must all be regarded in framing Institutions, which are designed for the regulation of mankind; such Institutions will otherwise fail, as instruments not adapted to the purpose for which they were intended. And if Christianity should ever become universal in the world, which prospect, however obscure and remote, the prophetical writings seem to open to us, it may easily be seen, that the Outward Form of it must in different places be still more different, than it is in the several countries, where it now subsists.

In a Nation, like our own, powerful and opulent, extensive in its dominions, and spreading its connections to all parts of the world, highly improved in arts and knowledge, holding forth rewards to every sort of Merit, and in its manners civilized even to excess, the qualifications requisite for every Profession are extended; there is a demand for more knowledge and for superior abilities; every rank of

life muſt have its due encouragement, that it may be well filled; muſt have its reaſonable proviſion, that the duties of it may be diſcharged with decency and utility.

It is obvious, how difficult and complicated ſome departments of buſineſs become in ſuch a country. What an arduous taſk is it to guide a Political Machine, compoſed of ſo many different and perhaps diſcordant parts! How numerous and extenſive are its Commercial Connections! What a comprehenſive knowledge of theſe ſhould the Stateſman have, who is to regulate them; the Merchant, whoſe fortune depends on them! How voluminous and intricate muſt be its Code of Laws, which are to regard ſo many objects, to protect ſo many different intereſts! What a call for ſtudy and abilities in thoſe of the Profeſſion to interpret, to reconcile, to apply them all; for wiſdom in Legiſlators to amend, to repeal Old Laws, and to enact others, as circumſtances change, as emergencies ariſe, and new evils require new remedies! All Profeſſions are not indeed equally affected with theſe by the publick condition of our country; but perhaps they are all affected in ſome degree; and from theſe the Eccleſiaſtical Profeſſion ſhould not be excepted, however remote its province may ſeem from the purſuits and buſineſs of the world.

Where the higher ranks uſually conſiſt of perſons of improved underſtandings and general knowledge, they expect, (and it is a moſt reaſonable expectation) that the Religious Teacher,

Teacher, who is to addreſs them, ſhould alſo be himſelf competently furniſhed with it; that he ſhould be able to offer them arguments fitted to perſuade and to convince them, in ſubſtance ſuch as are applicable to reaſonable, to enlightened minds, and conveyed in a manner, which may at leaſt not give diſguſt inſtead of recommending them.

In a country alſo like our own, fertile in ſpeculations on all ſubjects, luxuriant in its opinions, and where there is full liberty to utter all alike, whether of a good or an evil tendency, there are continual calls on the Miniſters of the Goſpel to counteract the attempts of its adverſaries; to ſilence miſapplied ridicule; to oppoſe genuine knowledge, and good ſenſe improved by attention and habit, to ſophiſtical reaſonings and falſe philoſophy. It is not, that every individual of the Profeſſion is called upon for theſe ſervices; but in the collective body there ſhould always be a fund ſufficient to anſwer all the demands, that can be made on it. The qualifications requiſite for theſe purpoſes do not come gratuitouſly; a certain courſe of education muſt be purſued, certain opportunities of inſtruction embraced, the expence of which will increaſe together with the increaſing opulence of the country.

In the preſent flouriſhing ſtate of this Nation, amidſt its Arts, its Commerce, its Publick Buſineſs, the wideſt field is laid open for the exertion of men's induſtry and abilities; they have all poſſible encouragement afforded them from the

Rewards both of Honour and Wealth, which every ſpecies of excellence is almoſt ſure of attaining. Should the Clerical Profeſſion alone diſclaim all title to theſe; ſhould it by the laws of our country be wholly excluded from them; will not the natural conſequence be, that men, capable of excelling, will betake themſelves to other paths of life, where theſe objects are full in their view, and where they may be purſued conſiſtently with integrity and virtue? For it would ill become Us to ſuppoſe, that theſe qualities are confined to our own Profeſſion, or that men may not in other departments of ſociety render ſervices alike acceptable to God and beneficial to Mankind.

Take away therefore the Rewards, which all other ranks of life profeſs to ſolicit, and which Providence meant for the natural encouragement of Merit, when reaſonably purſued, and this Profeſſion will be deſerted by thoſe men, who are beſt qualified for the eminent and difficult parts of it. Eccleſiaſtical Honours and Wealth may perhaps to the ears of many ſound invidious; many may be diſpoſed to reprobate them altogether as inconſiſtent with ſound policy; but in this our country, ſuch Honours are intimately connected with its whole Civil Conſtitution, under which (I truſt) we feel ourſelves too happy to wiſh for any conſiderable change to be made in it; and ſuch Wealth, if it be ever accumulated, (which is comparatively very ſeldom the caſe) flows back again into the ſociety at large; the Clergy of England being

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in that capacity not the leſs Citizens, and being attached to their country by all the ties, which can bind any other member of the ſtate.

But beſides the very higheſt offices of ſuch a Profeſſion, to which conſiderable dignity and emoluments are annexed, there ſhould be on the whole a reaſonable proſpect of Competence to the bulk of its members; competence I mean, adapted to preſent habits and preſent manners. Without this the general rank of the Profeſſion will be lowered; men of reputable family and connections will not engage in it; and it will ſuffer not in its appearance only but in its influence. For in a country, where regard is paid to Family and certain ranks of life; where Riches abound, and have ſtill more regard paid to them; every ſort of publick character, to which any degree of authority is committed, in order to its being executed uſefully and effectually, muſt preſerve a decent external figure, muſt at leaſt be raiſed above meanneſs and contempt. Whatever the Romans might do in the times of their ſimplicity, the people of this country would not (I preſume) now look up with great reverence to a Senator, who ſhould be called from his Cottage; or a General from his Plough.

To inſtruct men in the duties they owe to God, is to exerciſe an office of ſome authority; which, however important and ſalutary, any thing like diſtreſs will diſcredit and humiliate in the eyes of the Publick, who are too apt to judge of

things

things by their outward appearance, and to conſider figure in the world as the beſt title to reſpect. It is indeed to be lamented, that any of our Brethren ſhould be in a ſituation, in which they are not only expoſed to all the domeſtick inconveniences attending a ſcanty ſubſiſtence; but alſo have it not in their power to command that regard, to which their office is entitled, and which is neceſſary to their diſcharging it with utility and effect.

But in all human affairs we muſt always expect to find a large proportion of Defects and Imperfections. In other matters of the world they are more readily admitted and excuſed; while in thoſe that concern Religion, men are apt to be leſs reaſonable, and to require a degree of Perfection, rather proportioned to the nature of that Being, from whom all true Religion is denied, than to the infirmities of thoſe, by whom it is adminiſtered and profeſt. ‘ * Religion is indeed ‘ a treaſure committed to us by God, but we have it in ‘ earthen veſſels’; and in them it cannot be kept free from impurity and alloy.

The obedience of mankind in general, as it is voluntary and not compulſive, as God does not force but only perſuades and convinces us, will always fall far ſhort of what in ſpeculation might be expected; neither will men, whoſe peculiar

* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

province

province it is to teach others their duty, always act agreeably to their function and character. It may be ſuppoſed that moſt of thoſe, who engage in a profeſſion, where decent and virtuous conduct is particularly requiſite to their ſucceſs in it, are previouſly determined to preſerve ſuch a conduct; the ſtudies and duties of this profeſſion do in their nature tend to amend our lives, to direct our minds to ſerious and important ſubjects; and the decorum neceſſary to be obſerved in it generally reſtrains men from giving open and publick offence. But all theſe particular reaſons do not ſo far operate as to make the Miniſters of Religion a ſpecies exempt from the failings of other men; to make them act in a manner always becoming, and always exemplary. All ages afford inſtances, as of other bad men, ſo of immoral, intereſted, and ambitious Eccleſiaſticks; it is well, if theſe inſtances are rare, and by being conſidered as ſuch, atteſt the general decorum of the Clerical Character.

Eſtabliſhments alſo, as well the Individuals who compoſe them, will have their Defects; and thoſe circumſtances, which I have been conſidering as advantageous to our own Eſtabliſhment, will unavoidably be attended with their inconveniences. By a proſpect of ſharing its emoluments men will be induced to engage in the Clerical Profeſſion, who are by no means fit ſubjects for it, either with reſpect to their moral character, to their natural or acquired qualifications. Ambition alſo and intrigue, intereſt and connections will ſometimes improperly

obtain

obtain rewards, which ſhould be appropriated to diſtinguiſhed merit. From a variety of accidental cauſes the incomes annexed to Clerical employments will not always bear a due proportion to the labours attending them. It may be thought too, after allowing the fitneſs of a ſubordination in this profeſſion, and conſequently of a ſuitable difference of emoluments and rank; after allowing the expediency of giving every encouragement to laudable emulation, and inviting to the Church, men of credit, of abilities, and virtue by every inducement, that ſtill its revenues are diſtributed more unequally than even theſe purpoſes require; while the exceſs of them in ſome inſtances tempts men to neglect their duty, and affords the means of luxury and diſſipation, and the want of them in others cramps the beſt abilities, and renders the moſt upright intentions leſs uſeful.

All this will happen; and theſe Defects or any other, that may be obſerved in our Eſtabliſhment, ſhould not be conſidered by themſelves, but as connected with all its parts; from which taken together may reſult effects as good, as the neceſſary mixture of Imperfection in all human affairs will admit. For whenever we contemplate human affairs, the Imperfection always attending them ſhould conſtantly be kept in view; not for any pleaſure, unworthy of a good mind, in dwelling on the infirmities and vices of mankind, but that we may judge of things truly and impartially, that we may not raiſe our expectations to a height, where they are ſure of being diſappointed,

appointed, and having amuſed ourſelves with ſpeculative notions of Perfection, when we find nothing in real life correſponding to them, grow out of humour with ſociety and unfit to be uſeful members of it.

In religious matters eſpecially, a due ſenſe of this Imperfection, which pervades the world, will inſpire us with that moſt reaſonable and equitable of all principles, Toleration towards thoſe who differ from us; a principle, founded on the knowledge of our common infirmities and the neceſſity of mutual forbearance. And while we are looking on the Opinions and Inſtitutions of other Chriſtians with candour and allowance, it will teach us to treat our own Church with at leaſt the ſame good temper; not to be quick-ſighted in diſcerning faults, induſtrious in pointing them out, or ſevere in cenſuring them; and not to require in that a degree of perfection, which we ſee in all other things cannot be obtained.

Perfection is a point, which in this world we can never reach, but to which the endeavours of wiſe and good men will always be directed; and theſe endeavours are never more meritorious, they are never more ſure of being attended with applauſe of the moſt valuable ſort, than when they are employed in preſerving and improving Inſtitutions, important and beneficial to mankind, in adapting them to the unavoidable change of human circumſtances, and in correcting their defects. To look on theſe with candour and allowance

is the part of every Good and Reaſonable Man; to correct them with wiſdom, with a due regard to times and circumſtances, is the province of Great Men only, of Men diſtinguiſhed by their Station, their Integrity, and their Abilities.

If however, without laying any claim to Abſolute Perfection, we take a view of our Eſtabliſhment as compared with others, and appeal to experience for it's Merits, we ſhall ſee (I believe) abundant reaſon to approve and to eſteem it. We ſhall not eaſily find a Church, whoſe Publick Worſhip is conducted with more decorum and propriety; where the Truths of the Goſpel are explained more ably, it's Duties more faithfully inculcated; where Religious Knowledge has been cultivated with more diligence, or purſued with leſs reſtraint; where Reaſon, in it's moſt improved ſtate, has been more ſucceſsfully employed in defending and eſtabliſhing Chriſtianity; and, finally, where there remain to poſterity more illuſtrious Monuments of the Learning, the Wiſdom, and the Piety of it's members.

May Almighty God by his gracious Providence continue to bleſs this Church; and endue it's Miniſters of all ranks with Abilities and Virtues, beſt fitted to promote the True Religion of Chriſt, to advance the Happineſs and Salvation of Mankind!

THE END.

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